Practical Magic

For Beginners

Techniques & Rituals to Focus Magical Energy

BRANDY WILLIAMS

PRACTICAL MAGIC
for Beginners

About the Author

Brandy Williams is a Wiccan high priestess and ceremonial magician. She has been practicing and teaching magic for over twenty-five years. She is also a scholar, musician, and artist.

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Techniques
&
Rituals
to Focus
Magical Energy

Brandy Williams

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To Theodore Gill,
my most faithful coteacher,
reader, supporter, and love.

Contents

List of Exercises *xi*

Introduction 1

Introduction to Practical Magic *1*

Introduction to the Author *4*

ONE **Moving Energy** 9

TWO **Expanding the Senses** 19

Journals *23*

THREE **Sight** 25

FOUR **Sound** 35

FIVE **Feeling and Movement** 47

SIX **Using All the Senses** 61
Be Here Now 62
Memory 62
Dreamwork 64
Psychic Development 67
Innerspace 72

SEVEN **Working with Energy Fields** 79

EIGHT **Energies of Objects** 93
Handling Objects 93
Cleansing 95
Charging 99

NINE **Energy for Protection** 101
Warding 103
Cleaning and Charging a Warded Space 108
Dismantling Wards 110

TEN **Elements and Planets** 113
Planets 113
Elemental Energy 119

ELEVEN **Magical Timing** 125

TWELVE **Magical Processes** 139
Frazer's Laws 139
Polarity Magic 140
Synthema 141
Energy Return 141

Divination 142
The Pyramid 146

THIRTEEN **Ritual Results** 149
Statement of Intent 149
Types of Results 150
Future-Pacing 152
Have Faith in the Rite 153
Assessing the Results 154
Dare to Dream 156

FOURTEEN **Ritual Space and Tools** 157
The Circle 157
Ritual Tools 160
Tool Storage and Permanent Altar 165

THE RITUALS 167
The Ritual Outline 169

Find a Home 177

Get a Job 181

Get a Job Now! 186

Support of Your Colleagues 188

Need Money Now! 191

Prosperity 193

Take a Trip 197

Go on a Journey 201

Circle of Friends 205

Control Time 209

For Justice 212

Emotional Healing 215

Protection 218

Physical Healing 221

Healing Another 224

A New Love 227

Sustain a Love 231

Release a Love 234

Creative Inspiration 237

Find a Spiritual Path 240

Afterword 245

Glossary 249
Bibliography 255
Index 261

Exercises

Chapter 1

1. Feeling Energy 10
2. Conscious Breathing 12
3. Touching the Earth: The Mountain 14
4. Finding the Center 15
5. The Tree 15
6. Sun and Moon 16

Chapter 2

7. Journal 24

Chapter 3

8. Notice the World: Colors 26
9. Quiet the Mind 26
10. Notice the World: Shapes 27

11. Visual Remembering 28
12. Visual Construction 28
13. Seeing Shapes 29
14. Seeing Objects 30
15. Seeing Objects on the Screen 30
16. Seeing with Open Eyes 31
17. Seeing Your Own Aura 31
18. Seeing a Partner's Aura 32
19. Group Aura Exercise 32

Chapter 4

20. Notice the World: Count the Sounds 35
21. Playlist 36
22. Drumbeat 37
23. Get Thee Gone! 38
24. Read a Poem 40
25. Find Your Vibrational Note 40
26. Singing the Overtones 41
27. Chant the Vowels 42
28. Turn the Sound Off 43
29. Make an Affirmation 44

Chapter 5

30. Notice the World: Feel the Air 47
31. Conscious Walking 48
32. Expressing Emotion 50
33. Sensing Emotion 50
34. Grounding Emotion 51

35. Generating Enthusiasm 52
36. The Meditation Gesture 53
37. Sit on a Chair 54
38. Sit on Your Heels 54
39. Lie Down 55
40. Circumambulation 55
41. Rocking Trance 57
42. Spinning Trance 57
43. Piercing 58
44. Pentagram 58

Chapter 6

45. Notice the World 62
46. Yesterday 63
47. Baby Thoughts 63
48. Birthdays 64
49. Remember Dreams 64
50. Completing the Dream 66
51. Talking to the Dream 67
52. What's Around the Corner? 68
53. Seeing the World 68
54. Who's on the Phone? 68
55. Scrying 69
56. Telepathy 70
57. Dreaming Tomorrow 71
58. Entering Innerspace 74
59. Building Your Relaxation Space 75
60. My Day Tomorrow 76

Chapter 7

61. The Shield 80
62. Energizing the Chakras 84
63. Clearing Blocks 88
64. Sensing the Place 90
65. Shielding a Place 91

Chapter 8

66. Psychometry 94
67. The Glove 95
68. Cleansing an Object 96
69. The Bracelets 97
70. Cleanse Yourself 98
71. Cleanse a Space 98
72. Charging Objects 99

Chapter 9

73. Using a Personal Ward 104
74. Protecting a Space 107
75. Cleaning a Warded Space 109
76. Clearing Wards 110

Chapter 11

77. Align with the Sun 126
78. Observe Moon Phases 128
79. Align with the Moon 129
80. Moontime Power 130

81. Calculate the Planetary Hours 132
82. Notice the Seasons 137

Chapter 12

83. Getting to Know Your Deck 144
84. Doing a Reading for a Ritual 145

Introduction

Introduction to Practical Magic

Magic is the art of the possible. Understanding what magic is, and how to use it, gives us the invaluable power of choice. We can decide where we want to live, how we work, the kind of love we want to invite into our lives. Magic can give us the freedom and the knowledge to follow a spiritual path.

The power of choice doesn't come about simply by knowing the right spell. While spellcraft is a venerable branch of magic with much useful knowledge to offer, simply putting the right ingredients together and saying a rhyming couplet will not necessarily achieve the result we want. For reliable results we must possess the skills to make the spell happen. To acquire those skills, we need to exercise them and flex our magical muscles. We must also

understand why it is that magic works and what processes underlie the actions that we take to affect the world.

When we first exercise magical skills, change happens very quickly. The smallest action has immediate positive results. This is because our culture has neglected magic for many centuries. We've lost the day-to-day contact with the energies of the earth, the planets, and our own minds, the connections that make us aware of the processes that shape the world. Magic puts us in touch with those energies once again. As we continue to develop magical skills, we lay the foundation for more complicated ritual actions. While we are doing magic to improve our lives, we find that our lives have become more magical. We are shaping ourselves in order to shape the world.

Many religions and philosophies use some kind of magic in their spiritual practice. Today, magic has fallen out of favor among most Christians, although in Hellenistic times Christians used spells alongside Jews and Pagans. This book does not care whether you are Christian, Wiccan, Pagan, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or atheist; whether you are a Mason or a Rosicrucian or a Theosophist; whether you are black or white or multicolored, male or female or transitioning, young or old. Magic is for everyone. You can combine the techniques you will learn in this book with any religious or philosophical system, or use them on their own.

In this book we will be learning a vocabulary: What is energy? What exactly does it mean to ground? What is a ward? We will learn basic techniques of protection, for ourselves and for our possessions. We will learn how to

cleanse ourselves and our homes of energies we don't want around, and how to attract the energies we do want. We will look at the effect of time on rituals. We will examine magical processes underlying spells and what makes rites actually work. We will learn a ritual methodology that allows us to put together our own rites. Finally, we'll talk about the results we want from our rites, and look at some examples of created rituals designed to achieve specific, real-world results.

This book is short on theory and long on practice. From the first chapter we jump into exercises that put the lesson into use. Later, you can fit these lessons into any religious, philosophical, or magical system that you like, and any system will provide us with a great deal more theory about why ritual works the way it does. This book concentrates on techniques that are immediately practical.

Whatever path you are on, this book will give you the tools to straighten out your physical life, and provide a solid foundation for your spiritual pursuits. With the techniques of ritual magic, you can go on to study one of the branches of Witchcraft; ceremonial magic, including the Golden Dawn, Aurum Solis, and Thelemic systems; any of the Neopagan religious survivals and reconstructions; Gnostic Christianity; mystic Judaism; Sufism; or any religion or philosophy you choose. Or, you can simply use ritual magic as a way to organize your spellwork, and live a happier life. What you do with this power is up to you!

Practical magic describes the kind of magic that helps you to live your life the way you want to live. It also means

that as you develop your skills, you see the world more and more as a magical place. It becomes easier and easier to see and use the processes that shape the world and your experience in it. Magic becomes the way you live.

Introduction to the Author

Whenever I read a book on magic, I am curious about the writer. Who is this person? What kind of experience does she have? Has he actually done the exercises he talks about, or is he running an experiment—on me? My favorite books are those that discuss the writers' experiences, and give stories about how the exercises worked for them.

So I'm going to give you a brief introduction to who I am. I've had a diverse magical career. In my late teens and early twenties, I studied several martial arts. I learned the 108 movements of a complete tai chi form. I took beginner's aikido, where I learned how to breathe and move energy in my body, and tae kwon do, where I learned how to dance with an opponent. I also studied a bit of yoga, which similarly focused on breathing and finding one's energy. This training affected my understanding of energy at least as profoundly as any of the formal magical disciplines.

I also studied psychological techniques. I read through Freud, Jung, and Adler, and the Neuro-Linguistic Programming studies of Bandler and Grinder. The NLP worldview affected me deeply, as it is imminently practical. It is focused on what the therapist can see, and how the senses work to

represent the world. Keeping NLP in mind helps make sense out of the jumble of magical practices.

I spent my teen years trying to figure out what I believed. When I discovered Witchcraft I immediately felt that I had come home. "Once a Witch, always a Witch" was a saying in one of the books I read early on, and I felt that I was already a Witch. Later I found a traditional Wiccan line that was willing to initiate me. Wicca is still my first love as a religion.

I did a retreat in my late twenties, spending three years living and working in an apple orchard and studying ceremonial magic. I worked through the Golden Dawn knowledge lectures and all of the exercises in the Aurum Solis books. Later, I also studied the philosophy and religion of Thelema. After my Qabalah retreat, I moved back to a large city and became quite active in the Neopagan community, creating rituals and gatherings.

Both my Pagan reconstruction work and my ceremonial magic work led me to the study of history, which remains my enduring passion. I discovered that the basics of today's occult sciences rest in a series of ideas and rituals collected in the Hermetica and in the Greek magical papyri. For example, the idea of four directions, four winds, and four archangels are all found in these documents, which are two millennia old. The Hellenistic culture that produced these texts mixed Christian, Jewish, Greek, Babylonian, and Egyptian sources. These magical ideas and techniques spread widely around the world. Hindu texts talk about the four directions, and

the Islamic Arabic world absorbed a good many Hermetic doctrines.

I have taught with a rotating crew of several other teachers in a series of classes we jointly named "School of Night." Our most popular class was an eight-week course in magical fundamentals. For these classes I drew on all my experiences in martial arts, psychology, Witchcraft, ceremonial magic, Thelema, group ritual construction, and history to put together a pared-down set of techniques that could be simply learned by anyone with a desire to explore magic. Today I continue to teach classes in magic both to beginners and experienced practitioners, to Wiccans, Pagans, and ceremonial magicians, and anyone who is interested in learning about the occult arts.

This book comes out of those classes. I hasten to add that while I have at times taught with others, I take total responsibility for the material in this book—both its virtues and its flaws. People continually ask me to provide them with written material to augment the classes I give. I needed a text I could hand to people and say, "Here—this should get you started!"

However much I study, I realize that I am still just a beginner in the magical sciences. There is so much to learn, so many avenues to explore, that it can easily occupy an entire happy lifetime. I hope to continue to learn and grow for many years to come.

The exercises and rites in this book are not just for beginners. I come back to them again and again. This is the stuff I use day to day: ground, center, shield, ward my

house and my car, work small rites for friendship and love and prosperity. These are fundamental skills not because you learn them and forget them, or learn them and go on to bigger and better things, but because they are the skills that you use over and over every day of your magical life.

one

Moving Energy

Every ritual—in fact, every magical act—we perform relies on our ability to move energy through our bodies. Understanding energy is the key to understanding how to work magic. It's the word we hear most often when people talk about magic, and it's the least well defined. Mostly we learn what the word means from context—how people talk about energy.

The word *energy* means something different to a scientist. If you know the scientific definitions of the word, it's very tempting to use them to explain magical energy, so it's important to keep in mind that they're not the same. The scientific understanding of energy is at best a metaphor for magical energy; if you lean too much on the hard science definitions, you run the risk of limiting your understanding of how energy works in the occult sciences.

In daily life we talk about the energy that makes electricity, which runs the house at the flip of a switch. Companies buy and sell this type of energy as a commodity. We also talk about physical energy (our ability to move around, whether we are tired or fresh and relaxed) and emotional energy (whether we are depressed or excited and raring to go!).

In magical terms, energy means something different from all of these definitions. It is a power that we cannot measure with an instrument. Magicians talk about an energy body, which can circulate and store energy. There is also the energy of the forces around us: the elements of fire and wind and water, the planet earth, and the other planets in our solar system. We understand the energy of these forces and how they interlace within our world.

Energy constantly moves in your body. You can attract energy from other sources, and circulate it inside yourself. You can also use your body to move energy around in ritual space. In this chapter we will be focusing on how your personal energy interacts with the energy of your environment, and how to control that interaction consciously.

The body comes equipped with its own human energy. Martial artists sometimes call this energy *chi* or *ki*. You can feel it very easily just by raising your hands.

Feeling Energy

Lift your arms to chest level and turn your hands so that the palms face each other. Hold them there for a moment or so. You have set up an energy connec-

tion between your hands. What do you experience? Do you see the energy, or feel it? Give yourself a moment to notice your reaction before you read on.

It's okay if you don't feel anything; it can take some time to become aware of chi. People often describe the feeling of energy flowing between their hands as tingly or warm. You might have even found that your hands started to heat up and felt a pressure against your palms. People usually use physical analogues to describe energy: color or brightness (red or yellow, dull or bright), texture or temperature (smooth or rough, hot or cool), and pitch or volume (high or low, loud or soft).

Just as the physical body has organs and blood vessels, the energy body has *chakras* (centers of energy) and *meridians* (channels of energy). The energy or subtle body also has a skin: the *aura.* Energy is constantly circulating within your energy body. We take it in and give it off, use it up in activity and replenish it.

Health is essential to the practice of ritual magic. If the physical body is trashed, the energy body is going to be trashed too. That doesn't mean you can't do these exercises—you can. Start circulating energy now, and that will start to clear up the physical body too. Just follow up with better health habits!

It is also important to pay attention to the health of the energy body. You can damage your energy body just as you can damage your physical body. Circulating energy helps to keep the channels clear and flowing freely, and

protecting the chakras helps to keep them from knotting up or losing energy.

Most energy work involves the central column. This is a pathway through the center of the body from the head to the feet. Centers of energy, or chakras, are located along the central column. The energy body meridians extend from the central column and branch out along your arms and legs. There are also energy centers that give out and take in energy in the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet. (See Figure 2 in chapter 7.)

We don't normally notice the pumping of the heart, and most of the time we aren't conscious of the process of breathing. In the same way, the energy circulation in the energy body goes on at a level below conscious awareness. We can become conscious of energy, just as we can become conscious of our heartbeat. In fact, noticing our heartbeat and breathing is a good way to begin learning about energy.

Conscious Breathing

Sit in a comfortable chair or cross-legged on the floor. Find your pulse by touching your wrist or any other place you can find a heartbeat. Now breathe in for four heartbeats, hold your breath for two heartbeats, breathe out for four heartbeats, and hold your exhalation for two heartbeats. Do this four times.

This can feel pretty strange the first time you do it. You might find that your heartbeat slows down. That's okay,

just keep on counting. You might find that you're breathing very quickly or slowly, depending on how fast your heart is beating. If you breathe slowly you take in a lot of oxygen, which might cause a little dizziness. All of these effects go away with practice.

Many ritual techniques assume that we are able to control our own breathing. We can use our breath to pull a particular kind of energy into the body. We might use rhythmic breathing to time a given operation. As air is vitally necessary to our continuing ability to walk around on the planet, it can become a carrier for the more subtle energies we will work with.

Our personal energy exists within the field of energy of the earth and it interacts with the earth's energy. Just as we are constantly taking in physical energy from the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and the sunshine on our skin, so is our energy body constantly taking in and giving out energy from the forces all around us.

The body's energy is especially linked to the energy of the earth and the sun. All of us move around within the energy field of the earth. We sometimes think of ourselves as walking on the earth, but in truth we are walking around inside the earth, as we are moving within an atmosphere that extends many miles above us. The earth's energy surrounds us—below, above, and all around—and sustains us throughout our lives.

We can learn to consciously direct the energy of the earth into our bodies. This serves as an immediate source of energy when we're tired. Similarly, we can learn to take

excess energy from our bodies. Some people refer to this exercise as *grounding.* The idea of grounding is to balance the state of your energy body with the charge in the earth's energy around you. If we're low on energy, we can take some from the earth, and if we have a lot of energy and it's making us jittery, we can put the extra back into the ground.

Touching the Earth: The Mountain

Take your shoes and socks off and stand on the floor. If you can go outside, it's great to do this exercise on the bare earth. Feel and see energy moving from the earth through the soles of your feet, into your body, all the way up your legs, up your central column, to the top of your head. Now push the energy from the top of your head back down the central column, through your legs, and into the earth.

Grounding is half of the process of grounding and centering. *Centering* means finding out where the energy is in your body, and starting every body and energy movement from a sense of calm and power.

The easiest way to center is to focus on a part of the body that martial artists call the *one point* or *tan t'ien.* This is a point in the abdomen about two fingers' width below the belly button. It's the center of gravity in the body, the point of physical balance. The one point is a very convenient place to start and end energy circulations.

Finding the Center

Stand with your feet about a shoulder's width apart. Bend your knees slightly. Place your attention at your one point. Now rock forward and back. Let the rocking get smaller and smaller until you balance and stop. Next, rock from side to side. Let the rocking get smaller and smaller until you find your center of balance, and stop naturally.

We can move energy into and out from the body through the soles of the feet. We can also give out and take in energy through the top of the head. The Tree exercise trains us to draw energy from the earth and circulate it. It also helps to cleanse and balance the energy body.

The Tree

Feel and see energy moving out like roots from your one point, down through your legs, to the soles of your feet. Now push those roots down into the ground. Keep pushing down, as far as you can go, until you feel your roots coming to a natural stop.

When you have reached your comfortable depth, see and feel energy moving up through your roots, through the soles of your feet, and into your one point.

Next, feel and see the energy moving up your central column, to the top of your head, and then a little bit beyond to a chakra or globe a few inches above your head. Let the energy spill out from that center and shower down all around you back into the earth.

You are circulating earth energy up through your roots, out the top of your head, and back through your roots again.

When you have finished, let the energy fall back down the central column to your one point. Gradually feel and see your roots ascending back through the earth, through the soles of your feet, and back into your one point.

We naturally draw energy from the earth. Like all other living things, we also draw energy from the sun, and to a lesser extent from the moon. We can also learn to consciously circulate solar and lunar energy through the energy body.

Sun and Moon

Stand where you can see the sun or moon. It's nice if the light can be touching your skin but not necessary. Now see and feel the energy center just above your head. See and feel the moonlight or sunlight entering that center. Draw it down through the central column to your one point. From there, push the energy out along your arms and along your legs. Feel it filling up your body.

When you have finished, let the energy move down your legs through the soles of your feet and into the earth.

Once we have filled ourselves with energy, we can use it in a magical working or we can push it back down into the

earth. We do not return solar and lunar energy by pushing it up out the central column back toward the sky. Whenever we have generated more energy than we can use in an energy exercise, the best thing to do with it is to push it back down into the earth. There are two reasons for this. First, moving energy down the central column is safest for the human body, as it tends to balance and calm your energy. Also, the human energy body is more attuned to the energy of the earth, and belongs to the earth's field. We can pull energy in from the planets, but it is much harder to exchange energy and give it back—it will still be moving through the earth's field. So to ground excess energy, we put it down into the earth.

With the exercises in this chapter we have begun to take conscious control of the energy body. In the next few chapters we will study the senses of sight and hearing, movement, and learn to work more effectively in the magical world.

To Write to the Author

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